

HOME ECONOMICS FOR THE BLIND

Louise Danhauer

HV 1658

D

HV 1658



Hx 1658  
D  
copy



AMERICAN FOUNDATION  
FOR THE BLIND INC.



# Home Economics for the Blind

Louise Danhauer

Miss Danhauer, as a teacher of home economics in the Indiana School for the Blind in Indianapolis, has written an interesting account of one of her typical days. As was true with Miss Cissna, her work is naturally different from that of the ordinary public-school teacher, but that difference is certainly not as she had expected it would be.

At sometime or another everyone has seen a blind person — perhaps known one casually or intimately. What has been your reaction toward him? Have you thought sadly, "Oh, that poor, poor man, how unhappy he must be." Or have you said in disgust, "He is a burden and nuisance to society." He is neither. He need not be unhappy, and there is a place for him in this world, just as there is one for you and for me. Through my experiences at the Indiana School for the Blind, proof of this statement has been shown me in countless ways.

When I took this position, I had no idea of what blind children could do, how I might find out what their capacities were, or how I could teach them to sew, crochet, knit, and cook.

I was warned that some students would be unattractive, that they were sensitive, and some could see a little while others could not. I was given the printed copies of their texts for foods and hygiene. That was all. I could find no books on teaching home economics to the blind save for a chapter from a book printed by the New York Institute for the Blind.

What I expected was not clear in my mind, but it was something like this. They would be sweet inactive children with very little spirit. There would be no discipline problems. I could not expect them to cut out a dress, to sew on the machine, or to thread their own needles. In cooking

class, I expected to do most of the measuring and to clean up after them. I would not expect them to set the regulator on the oven, to put muffins in a muffin tin, or to determine whether an egg was fresh or not.

How very wrong I was, for they do all that and much more. They have taught me as much as I have taught them, if not more. Yet by going slowly, observing, and listening to the students, trying to be patient and understanding, I have made no serious blunders.

When I majored in home economics, I expected to teach high-school students — I teach students from the third grade through high school. I did not learn to crochet — the girls here like to crochet rugs more than anything else. I majored in art and thought of ways I could use it in teaching — I could make charts and draw pictures of the good and poor selections of clothing, or I could draw the beef carcass on the board and teach the various wholesale and retail cuts of meat. I can not use any of these ideas. Visual aids, such as movies and charts put out by advertisers, were stressed so much in college. They are of no help to my students. My files are full of illustrative materials that I can not use. To stand before the seventh-grade sewing class and give a demonstration on how to make the various facings would not teach them anything. They must be taught individually. The child must first be given a mental picture of what she is doing (this is much harder for those who have never seen). Then, by experimentation, each child must learn how she can hold the material in her hands so that she can hold it firmly and not lose her place or get mixed up in her sense of direction, yet have the finger or fingers free to guide the needle and determine the

size of the stitch. (Some children develop the index finger while others can use the one next to it to better advantage.) It is for me to guide each girl's hands until she understands what she is doing.

To give an idea of what my experiences are at the School for the Blind, I will relate some of the happenings of an ordinary school day. My first class includes the third and sixth grades. At the beginning, I taught the third graders to make mats. This gave them a sense of direction and space. It took one and a half weeks to teach one child to wind the yarn on the frame, but once she learned she did very well. They are such cheerful children and express themselves so freely. There is one child in this class who is like a weather forecast. Every morning she comes in smiling around the mouth but still looking sad about her milky eyes and announces, "I'm so happy today" or she will look thoroughly sad and say, "I'm not happy today." Just before Christmas she was so happy she "didn't know what to do." I asked if she would like to go in the other room and jump up and down. "All right, I will." She was more settled the rest of the period. Even the little ones get their own materials and put them away although they still walk with their hands outstretched (as the child grows older, she learns to use her ears to pick up sound waves, thereby detecting whether a door is open or not, etc.)

Then come the fourth and fifth grades. Most of these girls are just learning to crochet. How they do like to make something useful and beautiful and have their parents compliment them. At the same time, I have two high-school girls, Ruth and Carmen, who never cease to amaze me. Ruth cuts out her own dresses after I place on the pattern. She makes tailor tacks and threads the sewing machine. She is now working on her fourth dress which is, incidentally, a rayon crepe. Carmen is slower but sews just as beautifully on the sewing machine as Ruth and has unlimited patience.

(Continued on page 118)

Teacher College Journal  
Vol. 16, No. 5, May 1945



# I Was Too Idealistic

Juanita Stutz Hunter

*Mrs. Hunter, an English and social studies teacher in Clinton, Indiana, admits many erroneous ideas she had in connection with teaching. Even so, she believes teaching as a profession is a challenge well worth the effort.*

As I attempt to put down on paper how my experience in the teaching profession differs from what I expected, I wonder why I was not prepared



more fully for what I found. My education professors told me definitely that I would be teaching children, and yet I spent most of my time learning history. They told me that children differed, and I only pictured them lined up on an intellectual curve. The truth of their advice did not penetrate my idealistic brain until I met my profession face to face.

When the time came for me to take the step from student to teacher, I did not expect so great a change. I wanted teaching to be a continuation of my studies. Somehow or other, teaching was to offer me a definite intellectual challenge. I looked forward to teaching older students because they would have greater abilities to go with me into the unknown. They would have my curiosity and desire for learning.

And came disappointment! I probably could count on my fingers the number of students who have a natural desire to know, or care, who built Solomon's temple. For the sake of those few I long for time and materials to expand the work to its fullest. Instead, the greater portion of my time and energy go toward organizing the work for the remainder of the class. For them my problem is not broadening the subject but judging what few facts I should attempt to

teach. I must worry, not whether I have enough information to satisfy their thirsty minds, but how I can make them receptive for the few facts I am going to present. And I believe that I am justified in worrying about the choice of those few facts. How can I, as a beginning teacher — or as a mere human being, for that matter — know what knowledge each individual will need in his future life? What can I say which will make his life as successful, as enriched, as it should be? How can I be sure that I am really teaching those children and not just learning history myself?

The second problem of which I had no true appreciation while I was in college was that of individual differences. Of course, I had been well instructed about the existence of intellectual differences, and I had some rather definite ideas about how to deal with them. Neither did it take long for me to form an opinion of the abilities of my students. But I found myself facing a stone wall when I wanted to put some of my ideas into practice. If I only had an extra period to give Johnny some suggestions on outlining; and Mary, a seventh-grade student, needs help in word and sentence meaning. I dare not stop a whole class to aid these few. Too much of the time I teach for the middle group only to see boredom among my superior students and hopeless floundering by the slow ones. I find myself filled with revolutionary ideas about what should be done with the school system. Under the present method I seem to strive in vain to find time to meet the needs of all. I might be able to lay some of the blame on the present over-loading of teachers because of the labor shortage, but I am still wondering how much of the trouble is due to the nature of a typi-

cal class or to my inability to handle the problem well.

The time element is not the cause of difficulties in handling differences in personality, however. Here my problem was to gain by experience a more true understanding of what adolescents are.

I expected children to be better than the adults of the species. It startles me to see children treat each other the way they do. I still expect them to aid and respect each other on the basis of democratic equality. Instead I see quarreling, jealousy, tale-telling, and cheating. They laugh at each other's mistakes too much, and they bear grudges. I expect my students to have some respect for authorities, and I expected more of them to show some real ambition. Instead I find some of them respect no authority except force, and I am afraid nothing short of a firecracker could make some of them show any exertion.

These are some of the erroneous ideas that I had about school teaching. They were born out of idealism. But that does not mean that I can not still use these ideals as goals. If my students lack in intelligence and character what I expected them to have, to that extent must I work to raise them up. It is only after a year of experience that I know how great a challenge that can be.

## Seller . . .

(Continued from page 100)

abandon all "schoolteacherish" characteristics, public opinion of teachers would improve.

In final analysis, no training situation can equal the actual teaching situation. Artificialities are abandoned when the teacher accepts a job; she is on her own and must meet all situations with decisive action. Unimpeachable knowledge of the subject matter plus a well-rounded personality will insure confidence in teaching. Teaching demands a great deal of a person, but it gives a great deal in return.

Teachers College Journal



## Danhauer . . .

(Continued from page 105)

Next I have the seventh grade. They are learning to baste, slipstitch, sew on buttons and snaps, and make buttonholes and patches. They work at their own speed and each girl is taught individually. They are now learning to sew on the sewing machine. Last week three girls ran the needle through their fingers. If you think they were frightened and refused to learn to use the machine, you are mistaken. They laugh at their mistakes more than we sighted people do and are so unafraid. I bandaged the fingers, and back they went to try again. In order to guide, they must keep the index finger at the side of the presser foot, and if they move the finger inward — down goes the needle.

Just before noon I have eighth-grade hygiene. That is the time when the discipline problems arise. They "talk out," mumble under their breaths, and kick each other under the tables. They read the lesson from their braille volumes and recite just as in public schools. They also take notes and outlines in braille which is a very noisy and slow process.

In order that they might understand the various systems of the body, we have a skeleton and a plastic reproduction of the human body. In this class there are seven totally blind and six partially blind. Should the lesson be about the digestive system, I would take the seven blind individually and the partially seeing three at a time up to the plastic man. (They call him Frankie.) With the totally blind, I take their hands and run them around the mouth and down the trachea. I take the stomach and liver out, let the children examine them and compare the size of the two. Finally, I direct their hands around the intestines. So you see with each lesson of that sort, I must repeat it nine times — each time just as slowly and patiently as before.

In the afternoon I have eighth-grade sewing. These girls are working

on the same unit as the seventh grade, for apparently they had not been taught that before. After they have learned the fundamentals, they will make a project.

The last class is a high-school foods class. They are so efficient I often forget they do not see. The classroom discussion is much the same as in public schools except I dictate more notes and recipes than a teacher would if the girls had access to outside references. The girls are divided into two "families" and work out their own plans for the laboratory lesson. They keep the laboratory very clean and always put their equipment away neatly. They do all of their own measuring and mixing (a large part of which is done with the hands). They have prepared breakfasts and luncheons, baked cookies, cakes, and biscuits, made salads, and cleaned and cooked vegetables. It is their eagerness and will to learn and their patience and sense of humor that helps them do as well as girls with normal sight.

I think that often we do not realize that the blind are exactly like us except that they do not see. They have the same likes and dislikes, and the same high-school crushes. The girls wear sweaters and skirts and experiment with their hair. They wear make-up and some of my girls are very attractive. When they have parties or dances the gym is always decorated to the last detail. The girls talk for weeks about who is going with whom and what they are going to wear. They like fast music and jitterbugging. The radio is a marvelous invention — every dormitory has several.

Speaking of dormitories brings to mind another experience I did not expect. All of the employees (sixty in number) and the one hundred and twenty-five students live at the school. It is like a small town only more so. Everyone knows everyone else's business. Everyday is a lesson about how to not disagree and yet not agree on what so-and-so says about so-and-so.

Above all, my experience has made me realize just how petty our little

misfortunes are. These children have so little, yet they are so sweet and happy. If they can live in darkness and still smile and not be bitter, the rest of us should feel ashamed when we complain and think that life is not worth living. Yet we must not pity the blind for they really see much of this world that we sighted do not see. They can be happy if we, the sighted, treat them as normal human beings. So many well-meaning people give them their seats on the bus when it is not their feet that are afflicted. I have heard people make remarks as though they thought the child was also deaf. There will soon be many blinded boys coming back from the war. They will be bitter for they have seen. It is for us to help them feel normal and welcome in our so-called normal society.

## Carney . . .

(Continued from page 112)

ture with the correct name of the musician and his composition. This board is used by the departments with books and other supplementary materials. The librarian now has in mind an idea using pictures of famous leaders in the Allied and Axis powers. One of the columns will be the names of the men pictured, and the other column for what the individual is noted. If the correct contact is made with the picture and the columns, the lights above the columns will light.

Every month the bulletin board is decorated in keeping with the month. For instance, February was gay with valentines made from book jackets and paper doily frills suggesting that books made ideal valentine gifts. A large, red poster, edged with white doilies, was entitled "Give a Book." During March, posters of the shamrock and the harp called attention to Saint Patrick's Day and the Irish. The harp was constructed of Irish green and outlined in gold, and notes made of gold paper were on the strings resembling chords reading "Read Irish Stories." The Irish shamrock was a calendar of March. April



in the history of English literature, characters and environment, was more precious to him and more necessary than "food, clothing, and shelter."

Though Mr. Curry had the exceptional gift of recreating from word suggestion pictures, and all concrete images, yet he early sensed the limitations of his experience, being American country born and bred, in the interpreting of English background both physical and historical. So in the fall of 1910, this father of three young daughters, along with his cultivated, charming wife, pulled out their American roots and set out for Oxford University, England, there to drink deeply of the spring of English life and background. If one does not think this takes courage, let him try it at forty-one years of age among an alien people!

One gets out of reading just what one brings to it of experience of the physical world and life, with the assistance of maps, descriptions, nay, even photographers. Mr. Curry early learned that the advice the father gave his son in Tennyson's poem, "Northern Farmer, Old Style," had a wider application than to marriage, which advice might be paraphrased thus: "Don't read for background, Sammy, but go *where background is!*"

This idea of imbibing a knowledge and feeling for the effect of environment and racial characteristics by *direct contact* is still new in educational creeds in these United States of America. We are still deluded by the thought that the content of books is life, when really it is the most anemic substitute imaginable, being independent upon the vividness and response of the reader's imagination to word suggestion, the breadth of his experience, and his ability to read, really read, for adequate understanding.

Temperamentally, Mr. Curry belonged to the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. He was an idealist of the first water, as much of a recluse as St. Jerome in his cave with the document of the first Bible to love.

The world around him he created for himself, often quite distinct from reality — "made out of whole cloth." The men and women of King Arthur's round table were more real to him than anyone to whom he presumably was talking; more real than the Tom, Dick, and Harry of his student body who listened to him breathlessly and departing, "soon forgot what manner of man he was."

He always impressed the writer as St. Paul in his attitude toward the world he lived in, but not of its tragedies. Both joys and sorrows, he could assert with the Apostle Paul, "None of these things move me." He had practically not one iota of the evangelist or the reformer in his mental anatomy, very little even of the ordinary routinized teacher, as he presented the facts of life as set forth in literary form. If one understood and enjoyed, well and good; if not, well and good, too. It was not his to coerce any one, even to save that one's literary soul.

He was a realistic philosopher; he held coercion can never succeed, so why attempt. If Hitler could have sat under him! If a human being lives to mental maturity without discovering his limitations, even that he is a fool, your telling him or even diagramming his foolishness to him, will not convince him, but only spoil what otherwise might continue a beneficent human relationship. So thought Mr. Curry.

Not all, even among the elect of the teaching profession, are equally gifted, as this democracy with its public-school system is learning. The sooner the individual learns this, the better for him; it may save him from exhibiting his foolishness. Mr. Curry's attitude towards such a situation is best shown through a case in point.

In the years gone by, each member of the Normal School faculty signed a contract to teach his given subject, and also to conduct chapel exercises as his turn came, decided by his time of election and his position in the line of the faculty on the rostrum of the Assembly Room.

Not many professional public

speakers are blessed with a silver tongue, nor a golden voice, nay, not even a high I. Q. or skilled artisan-ship. Alas for the amateur who must speak in public, but more "alases" for his audience. Too frequently the amateur is wholly unconscious of his deficiency. A member of Mr. Curry's department went to him on one such occasion and said, "As his best friend, I beg of you to tell Mr. X to give up speaking in chapel, for his performance there is no criterion by which to judge his skill and value in the department of which he is a member. He is destroying his influence among the student body who judge him by his work on the chapel platform." Much to her astonishment and chagrin, Mr. Curry replied:

"My, but you are young! Do you think for a moment that telling him so would convince him? If he has lived this long, and repeated the situation again and again without sensing his limitations, telling him, even most diplomatically, would only lose me a friend and ruin an amicable relationship with an eminently worthwhile human being."

This philosophic, detached type of personality is difficult to evaluate; so many of us constitute ourselves our brother's keeper, and are out to reform every one. As a result we can scarcely credit one who is satisfied to let each "dree his own weird."

## Seville . . .

(Continued from page 99)

standards to be attained and maintained, the prevalent but surely not eternal problem of the measurement of accomplishment confronts us. How can we determine accurately what a student knows even if there is agreement as to what he should know? If these problems can be answered, we, as teachers, could determine introspectively whether or not we are teaching efficiently. My experience, though at present of short duration, has emphasized these question marks.



HV1658

c.1

D

Danhauer, Louise.

Home economics for the blind

Date Due

HV1658

c.1

D

AUTHOR

Danhauer, Louise.

TITLE

Home economics for the blind

DATE DUE

BORROWER'S NAME

Bro-Dart

Newark, 8, N. J. • Los Angeles 25, Calif.  
Toronto 6, Ontario

Made in U.S.A.



